National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

Impact of the changing food environment on dietary practices of an Inuit population in Arctic Canada

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Nutritional inadequacies and increasing chronic disease prevalence amongst Inuit in the Canadian Arctic highlight the need to address dietary practices. Research is needed to investigate the individual and environmental factors impacting diet to guide interventions. The present study aimed to explore multiple community perspectives of key factors affecting food choice and availability in Inuit communities in Nunavut, Canada. METHODS: Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with Inuit adults (nEuro Surveillance (Bulletin Europeen Sur Les Maladies Transmissibles; European Communicable Disease Bulletin)43) in two communities in Nunavut, Canada, and included community members, community leaders, elders, health staff and food shop staff. The interviewer transcribed the audio-taped interviews. Data were analysed using codes and the constant comparative method to determine categories and emergent themes. RESULTS: Thirty-three Inuit (27 females and six males) and 10 non-Inuit (four females and six males) adults participated. Traditional foods procured through hunting and gathering were considered the healthiest by community members, although multiple factors inhibited their procurement, including high petrol cost and decrease in traditional knowledge about hunting and gathering practices. Cost and quality were the main barriers to purchasing healthy foods at the shops. Community leaders and health staff identified multiple barriers to healthy eating in the community, such as skills to prepare some shop-bought foods. Shop managers identified several challenges to providing fresh produce and other perishable foods, such as long transportation routes that increase costs and harsh climatic conditions that may cause spoilage. They also cited factors influencing their decisions regarding whether to stock/discontinue certain foods, such as customers' requests, food cost and shelf-life. CONCLUSIONS: An intervention to reduce chronic disease risk and improve dietary adequacy amongst Nunavut Inuit may be effective by supporting individual behaviour modifications with food environment changes.

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Resource Description

Communication: ☑

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience: ☑

audience to whom the resource is directed

Policymaker, Public

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Food/Water Security

Food/Water Security: Food Access/Distribution

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Arctic

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Non-U.S. North America

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Malnutrition/Undernutrition, Other Health Impact

Other Health Impact: Increasing chronic disease

Intervention:

strategy to prepare for or reduce the impact of climate change on health

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation:

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern:

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Children, Low Socioeconomic Status, Racial/Ethnic Subgroup

Other Racial/Ethnic Subgroup: Inuit

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Timescale: ☒

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment: ☒

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content